Beat: News

Breast Health Day: Early Detection and Better Support Must Remain a Priority

European Commission

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USPA NEWS - Breast Health Day, marked on 15 October, puts the focus on breast cancer awareness, access to screening and the support women need throughout diagnosis, treatment and recovery.

“If you have the possibility to do a breast cancer screening, for free, offered by your country, why don’t you go?”

The question from Marzia Zambon, Executive Director of Europa Donna, the European Breast Cancer Coalition, highlights a continuing challenge: making screening available is only part of the work. Ensuring women feel informed, supported and able to attend is equally important.

Europa Donna holds Breast Health Day every 15 October, encouraging women of all ages to take time for their health. Its message brings together healthier lifestyles, awareness and the importance of early detection, while drawing attention to inequalities in access across Europe.

Fear, uncertainty and practical difficulties can all discourage participation. For some women, the concern is what a screening appointment might reveal. For others, the barriers involve accessing services or understanding the information they receive. Europa Donna’s campaigning recognises that encouraging attendance means addressing these concerns alongside improving provision.

Clear information matters. Healthier lifestyles can help reduce breast cancer risk, while screening has a different role: detecting cancer earlier, potentially before symptoms appear. Screening also has limitations, including false results and overdiagnosis, making balanced information an essential part of an informed decision.

For women who receive a diagnosis, the need for guidance becomes even greater. Understanding treatment options, meeting specialists and making decisions can feel overwhelming, particularly while trying to manage family responsibilities, employment and the emotional impact of cancer.

Support must therefore extend beyond medical appointments. Patients need information they can understand, opportunities to ask questions and help with the physical and psychological challenges that may follow.

“You go back to your life, but it’s not really your life anymore. That is why guidance for people living with breast cancer is so important,” Marzia explains.

“There should be much more health literacy shared with a woman upon diagnosis and much more support thereafter.”

Her comments underline why recovery cannot be measured simply by the end of treatment. Returning to work, rebuilding confidence and adjusting to everyday life can bring further difficulties. Care needs to recognise the individual behind the diagnosis and the continuing effects on their life.

At European level, Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan provides a framework covering prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment and quality of life. Its screening ambition included a target for 90% of eligible people in the EU to be offered breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screening by 2025. That was a policy target, rather than confirmation that access had been achieved everywhere.

Asked where the EU could make the biggest difference for women living with breast cancer, Marzia’s answer is direct.

“Implementing Europe’s cancer plan. The paperwork is done, now it’s time for the actual legwork.”

Breast Health Day is a reminder that commitments must translate into accessible services and meaningful support. Progress depends on women receiving clear information, screening programmes reaching those eligible, and patients having guidance throughout

treatment and beyond.

Behind every policy and screening invitation is a person whose experience matters. Keeping that person at the centre of care must remain the priority.

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